

Egypt

Facts and Statistics

Location: North East Africa bordering Palestine (Gaza Strip) 11 km, Israel 266 km, Libya 1,115 km, Sudan 1,273 km

Capital: Cairo

Climate: desert; hot, dry summers with moderate winters

Population: 76,117,421 (July 2004 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Eastern Hamitic stock (Egyptians, Bedouins, and Berbers) 99%, Greek, Nubian, Armenian, other European (primarily Italian and French) 1%

Religions: Muslim (mostly Sunni) 94%, Coptic Christian and other 6%

Government: republic

Language in Egypt

For almost 13 centuries Arabic has been the written and spoken language of Egypt. Before the Arab invasion in AD 639, Coptic, the language descended from ancient Egyptian, was the language of both religious and everyday life for the mass of the population; by the 12th century, however, it had been totally replaced by Arabic, continuing only as a liturgical language for the Coptic Orthodox Church. Arabic has become the language of both the Egyptian Christian and Muslim. The written form of the Arabic language, in grammar and syntax, has remained substantially unchanged since the 7th century. In other ways, however, the written language has changed the modern forms of style, word sequence, and phraseology are simpler and more flexible than in classical Arabic and are often directly derivative of English or French.

Why not learn some useful Arabic phrases?

Egyptian Society & Culture

Islam

Islam is practised by the majority of Egyptians and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam emanated from what is today Saudi Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's emissaries (following in the footsteps of Jesus, Moses, Abraham, etc) to bring revelation to mankind. He was distinguished with bringing a message for the whole of mankind, rather than just to a certain peoples. As Moses brought the Torah and Jesus the Bible, Muhammad brought the last book, the Quran. The Quran and the actions of the Prophet (the Sunnah) are used as the basis for all guidance in the religion.

Among certain obligations for Muslims are to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact time is listed in the local newspaper each day. Friday is the Muslim holy day. Everything is closed. Many companies also close on Thursday, making the weekend Thursday and Friday.

During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing. Expatriates are not required to fast; however, they must not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public.

Each night at sunset, families and friends gather together to celebrate the breaking of the fast (iftar). The festivities often continue well into the night. In general, things happen more slowly during Ramadan. Many businesses operate on a reduced schedule. Shops may be open and closed at unusual times.

Family Values

- . The family is the most significant unit of Egyptian society.
- . Kinship plays an important role in all social relations.
- . The individual is always subordinate to the family, tribe or group.
- . Nepotism is viewed positively, since it is patronage of one's family.
- . The family consists of both the nuclear and the extended family.

Egyptian Honor

- . Honor is an important facet of interpersonal relationships.
- . Respect and esteem for people is both a right and an obligation.
- . An individual's honor is intricately entwined with the reputation and honor of everyone in their family.
- . Honor requires that Egyptians demonstrate hospitality to friends and guests.
- . It also dictates that people dress as well as their financial circumstances allow, and show proper respect and deference to their elders and those in authority.
- . A man's word is considered his bond and to go back on your word is to bring dishonor to your family.

Social Class

- . Social class is very apparent in Egypt since it determines your access to power and position.
- . The social class an Egyptian is born into dictates their everyday life and the opportunities they will have.
- . There are three social classes: upper, middle, and lower.
- . Status is defined more by family background than by absolute wealth.
- . There is little social mobility.